

Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

(U.S.D.A. W.)



WAGES AND HOURS



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W9
No. 1693

MAIN

REPORT

*submitted by the Executive Council
to the 1965 Annual Delegate Meeting*



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1. The last Annual Delegate Meeting adopted by an overwhelming majority the Wages Report submitted by the Executive Council. Incorporated in the Report was a section concerned with long-term wage agreements. In adopting the Executive Council's Report on Wages, the 1964 Annual Delegate Meeting did so on the clear understanding that it had not committed the Union to long-term wage agreements, but only to a consideration of the principle involved in such agreements.

2. It was expressly stated in the Report that the principle of long-term wage agreements should be carefully and fully considered by each National Trade Conference and recommendations made accordingly.

3. In addition to adopting the Report, the Annual Delegate Meeting carried the following resolutions :

"This A.D.M. instructs the Executive Council to draw up what they consider to be a realistic wages application to be submitted simultaneously to both co-operative and private trade employers. It calls for these proposals to be considered at specially summoned branch meetings as the first stage in a nation-wide campaign to recruit new members and invigorate the Union. This A.D.M. considers that simultaneous applications will make a greater impact, obtain widespread publicity and generate a united campaign which will have better results than the present piecemeal procedures."

"This A.D.M., appreciating the many difficulties encountered by our negotiators when progressing the 1963-64 wages claims, pledges as follows :

- (a) To make every effort to achieve a 100 per cent membership amongst shop and distributive employees.
- (b) To again reiterate the terms of reference carried at the 1962 A.D.M., namely :
 - (i) That the Executive Council lay down basic principles to be followed in all future negotiations.
 - (ii) To establish the highest possible standard of living for distributive workers and other sections of our membership.
 - (iii) That agreements should reflect the increasing importance of skilled distributive and allied workers in the national economy.
 - (iv) To continually review wage rates in an endeavour to maintain them at the highest possible level.

Finally, that our negotiators be allowed freedom to negotiate within this framework, provided any final settlement is referred to the membership for consideration and decision wherever practicable."

"This A.D.M. instructs the Executive Council to approach the T.U.C. General Council with a view to securing the support of all affiliated Unions to the following proposal :

'That in so far as the continued increase in prices of practically all commodities, rents, rates, National Insurance, etc., necessitates a continued demand for increases in wages and with no signs of this ending, an all-out concerted effort be made to reverse this vicious spiral by demanding a reduction in the cost of living to balance our wages problem, thereby benefiting all workers and old age pensioners together, thus securing greater unity of all working classes.'

" This A.D.M. notes with appreciation the progress made in the direction of a five-day working week and looks forward to the time when it will be universally adopted. It believes that the Multiple Grocery five-day working week agreement represents a significant breakthrough in the efforts of the Union in the multiple trades which can be of great assistance in extending the five-day week to other sections of retail distribution. It calls upon the Executive Council to pursue vigorously its present policy on the five-day 40-hour working week without loss of pay and pledges the full support of the membership to the Executive Council in any steps which they may feel required to take to this end."

" This A.D.M. believes that if a universal five-day 40-hour working week is to be established throughout distribution, it is imperative that this principle be established in the national agreements for Co-operative Service."

" This A.D.M. considers that in accordance with Union policy an application for a 40-hour working week should be made to all wage negotiating bodies in 1964."

4. The Annual Report records the claims submitted and settlements reached during the year in the distributive trades and in many other sections of the Union's membership engaged in the various productive industries, services and other occupations in which the Union has an interest. The diverse range of occupations in which the Union is concerned (including a number in which other Unions are jointly involved) means that there can be no common point in time when wage claims are lodged or where settlements are reached for the Union's membership as a whole. Negotiations affecting one section or another are taking place as a continuing process throughout the year.

5. As previously pointed out, it is the practice of the Executive Council to keep the wages and working hours position under review month by month.

6. Since the last A.D.M., applications have been authorised and settlements endorsed at varying times affecting particular sections of the membership. In a number of ways the year 1964 was a year to remember. Despite considerable resistance from employers, wages settlements have been achieved on every sector of the distributive trades and in other trades and services in which the Union is concerned. Intense activity has taken place resulting in considerable gains to the Union's membership. Since this Report is primarily a policy statement, it is neither necessary nor would it be practicable to attempt to itemise the large number of settlements reached on claims submitted since the last A.D.M. Briefly, there are 70 national negotiating bodies on our list, including Joint Industrial Councils and Wages Councils on which U.S.D.A.W. is represented. Since 1st April, 1964, 51 have increased their wage rates and some have also reduced hours. A further six have reduced hours. Of the 13 that have not raised wages or cut hours, seven have applications under negotiations. Fifty-one of the negotiating bodies have raised their wages since 1st April, 1964. Of these, 17 have had increases of 12s. a week and more, 19 have had increases of between 10s. and 11s. 6d., and 15 have had increases of less than 10s. The membership concerned will in each case have been fully informed from the communications to branches and reports presented to meetings and National Trade Conferences.

7. It is appropriate to refer to the real breakthrough in retailing on the question of the five-day working week. Whilst there had been criticism in relation to the formula agreed for its operation, the principle of the five-day working week had become an accepted fact in retail distribution. Its acceptance and operation could act as a boost to a trade where the rate of labour turnover since the war has been considerably higher than in industry generally. The Annual Report indicates the difficult and at times critical nature of the negotiations.

8. During the year the Union has also intensified its demand for reduced hours. Since the A.D.M., hours in the multiple trades have been reduced. (Multiple Grocery from 44 to 42 operative from 1st March, 1965.) The working week in the Multiple Footwear and Tailoring Agreements has also been reduced. A two-hour reduction in the working week was agreed on the Retail Wages Councils.

9. In Retail Co-operative Service, the immediate task following last year's A.D.M., apart from negotiating at national level acceptance of the principle of the five-day working week, was to finalise as soon as possible the negotiations in respect of a Supermarket Agreement. At the time of writing this Report, the terms of settlement are subject to ratification by the members concerned and Societies.

10. At the end of the year, the Executive Council decided to request the Retail Co-operative Joint Trade Union Committee to submit a claim for 20s. per week increase for all adult workers, with appropriate increases to juniors, and a reduction of two hours in the normal working week laid down in the six National Agreements.

11. Corresponding wage applications have or will be made to the C.W.S., Multiple Trades, Wages Councils for the Retail Trades and other trades and industries with which the Union is associated, subject to consultation and agreement where other Unions are involved, on the final determination and timing of the application.

12. National Trade Conferences were requested, by decision of the last Annual Delegate Meeting, to discuss the issues involved in long-term wage agreements. This they have done during the year. It is not necessary in this Report to rewrite the criteria brought out in the 1964 Wages Report, or to attempt to analyse the arguments for and against put at Trade Conferences. The results are interesting.

13. There is no doubt from information given in the official reports of Conferences, that there was a large body of opinion represented at *four* Conferences in favour of acceptance of the principle. Delegates to these Conferences, which include the Retail Private Trade and Retail Co-operative, adopted the principle of long-term agreements by a large majority. In the case of the former, delegates also defeated a proposition requesting the withdrawal of the last Wages Report. At *three* other Conferences, a consensus of opinion emerged in support of the principle. No vote was taken at these Conferences. In terms of membership represented, this means that a large section of the Union's membership support the principle.

14. It must also be stated that within the past 12 months there has been an increase in the number of wage-fixing bodies which have adopted this method of wage fixing.

15. Given acceptance of results of an examination of the principle of long-term agreements by National Trade Conferences, it would be less than realistic not to recognise that whilst this is still a controversial issue, change usually is, there is, in fact, within the Union's membership large sections who genuinely believe, because of their intimate knowledge of the trades in which they are employed, that it would be advantageous to them if they were allowed to pursue, with a view to implementation, the principle of long-term agreements.

16. The Executive Council are of the considered opinion that where in any of the trades, occupations and services covered by the Union there is a willingness on the part of the membership concerned for future wage increases to be negotiated on the long-term basis, and there is a reasonably good chance of persuading the employer to negotiate a two or three-year settlement, with a cost-of-living safeguard, they should proceed accordingly.

17. At the beginning of the year, the T.U.C. sent to all affiliated Unions a copy of the Statement of Intent on Productivity, Prices and Incomes. The Executive Council accepted the statement purely as a first stage declaration towards an Incomes Policy. In the joint statement the representatives of the employers' organisations and the Trades Union Congress undertook, on behalf of their members, to co-operate with the Government in endeavouring, in the face of practical problems, to give effective shape to the machinery that the Government intend to establish for the following purposes :

- (i) To keep under review the general movement of prices and of money incomes of all kinds.
- (ii) To examine particular cases in order to advise whether or not the behaviour of prices or of wages, salaries or other money incomes is in the national interest as defined by the Government after consultation with management and Unions.

18. At their February meeting, the Executive Council received and noted a document from the T.U.C. setting out (the second stage) the function of machinery set up to administer a Prices and Incomes Policy.

19. The Executive Council have long been in the forefront of the advocates of economic planning. They are convinced of the necessity to plan the economy in the interests of the whole community. They accept that what is really needed is definitive planning and a policy for making better use of Britain's resources.

20. They recognise that it is the only means for ensuring a steadily expanding economy free from booms and slumps. It is in these conditions in which trade unions can do more effectively their main job of securing full and satisfying employment and getting real improvements in wages and working conditions. They are, moreover, satisfied that development of economic planning is essential for the prosperity of all working people and that the growth of real incomes of trade-unionists and the removal of social injustices should be within the compass of such a plan.

21. Clearly the main conclusion to be drawn from available statistical information on costs and prices in the last 10 years or so is that increases in wages of our members have been cancelled out by increases in prices. This self-defeating process has operated to a considerable extent in post-war years and is still going on. It is of the utmost importance that all sections of the Union's members should be made fully aware of the dangers of this situation.

22. Given that the achievement of economic growth and reasonable stability of prices will assist in creating the right economic and social conditions in which employers and trade-unionists can more easily settle their common problems, it is also a fact that a number of issues which arise from consideration of a prices and incomes policy are of direct concern and importance to this Union's membership.

One set of issues will concern the circumstances in which special exceptions will be made. Should special and exceptional treatment be accorded to workpeople in lowly paid industries, trades or occupations? Should priorities be given to increases in basic rates for workpeople employed in lowly paid trades? Another set of issues must have a bearing on the relative injustices in wage levels which apply to distribution and certain other trades. Is it possible for an incomes policy to redress injustices in the existing wages structure?

23. There are issues arising from consideration of a prices and incomes policy on which it is not possible to be specific or to make any firm commitment until the criteria involved in the all-important third stage of the declaration is known.

24. So far, the Executive Council has limited itself to acceptance in principle of the Declaration of Intent. When the criteria on which examinations of particular cases by the Prices and Incomes Review Board is known, they will again consider their position. At the appropriate time they will have to consider whether the economic and social advantages to the Union's members are sufficiently great to warrant adoption of the prices and incomes policy criteria. The Executive Council can commit themselves to support a policy only if they are satisfied that it is in the best interests of the Union's members in the short and long run.

25. Meanwhile, the Union's position is well-defined:

- (i) It will continue with the utmost vigour its applications for wage improvements based on a realistic assessment of the needs of its members.
- (ii) It will continue its efforts to secure a reduction in the standard working week, without loss of pay, designed to establish as soon as possible a five-day 40-hour working week in retail distribution and in other trades and services.
- (iii) It will continue to give attention to the need to revise wages structure so that it is adequate and commensurate with the duties and responsibilities, skill and experience involved.
- (iv) It will continue a policy, where circumstances are favourable, of establishing freely negotiated agreements for better wage rates and working conditions than are provided for under Wages Council Orders.

